

Regional Council Activity Report

January 26, 2000



Briefing to Member Agencies from Executive Director James M. Bourey

Executive Director's Report

The ongoing news coverage about the widening of the Superstition Freeway has led many to ask about the structure of the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG). Let me take this opportunity to provide a brief background on the history of MAG's development and why the federal government recognizes that regional decisions are best handled by local governments.

MAG is a regional organization that serves nearly three million people in an area encompassing more than 9,000 square miles. MAG is both a designated Council of Governments for the region, as well as a Metropolitan Planning Organization.

A Council of Governments (COG) is a public organization encompassing a multi-jurisdictional regional community. A COG serves local governments and citizens in the region by dealing with issues and needs that cross city, town, county and even state, boundaries. COGs were developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to a need for long-range planning and closer coordination of program activities by governments at all levels. MAG makes decisions on a broad spectrum of issues, including transportation, air quality, water quality, land use, solid waste, regional development and human services.

In 1973, the Federal Transportation Act required that each urbanized area with 50,000 or more population establish a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The federal government recognized that the government closest to the people and most accountable to its citizens — in other words municipal government — was best suited for making regional decisions. The federal law required that the Governor of each state designate the agency to serve as the MPO. MAG was designated as the MPO in 1973. Additional laws which followed, such as the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act and the Transportation Act for the 21st Century, further recognized the challenges of addressing congestion and air quality issues in urbanized areas and determined that MPOs could best address these issues. The laws further stipulate that the only way in which an organization can lose its MPO status is if governments representing 75% of the region's population, including the central city, vote for a change.

It can be challenging for an agency to make the decisions that will be of greatest benefit to the majority of citizens. Yet MAG's track record in acting in a regionally responsible manner is well-documented and well-proven. This can be seen in even the most controversial of issues, such as in recent decisions affecting the widening of the Superstition freeway.

Let me point out that the final vote on the plan for expanding the Superstition has not yet been taken. In March, the Regional Council is scheduled to take action on the Transportation Improvement Program. The program would accelerate the HOV lanes on the Superstition Freeway by 18-24 months. To accomplish this requires innovative financing and a design/build contract. Also planned is building general purpose lanes in the Mesa portion, through a loan for which Mesa will pay the interest. This would accelerate the general purpose lanes by several years. We intend to have a discussion on the financing for the project in February. We must also hear from the public regarding all of our transportation plans before this vote is taken.

It is also important to note that the MAG Long Range Transportation Plan (which covers 20 years) has never included general purpose lanes through the Tempe section of the Superstition. The plan has always placed a high priority on constructing HOV lanes throughout the region, and for several years has included constructing an HOV lane in each direction along the entire length of the Superstition, including through Tempe. Some have criticized the Regional Council for "siding" with Tempe in a vote to approve the MAG FY 2000-2004 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) last June. In truth, the council actually voted contrary to Tempe by retaining the HOV lanes in the program.

Some of the latest discussion has centered around where to place retaining walls in the Tempe portion of the freeway. The plan does contain money which would allow the retaining walls to be moved far enough to accommodate transportation improvements beyond the HOV lanes. However, MAG does not design freeways — that is ultimately ADOT's responsibility.

Beginning in 1985, MAG has been committed to building a regional freeway program. Let me close with just a few points on how we have demonstrated this commitment.

- MAG allocates more than \$30 million each year of MAG federal funds (approximately 50 percent) to the completion of the freeway program. In other urban areas, these funds would be used by cities for their own local transportation improvements. Our commitment to use MAG federal funds to construct state freeways is unmatched by other regional

planning organizations in this nation. This sharing of local funding for a state purpose demonstrates MAG's resolve to deliver a freeway system to our citizens and ensure mobility for this region.

- In 1991, a performance audit was conducted which put in place controls for the regional freeway system. Since that time, the system has been on-budget and on-time.
- In 1998, MAG led an effort for this region to receive its fair share of federal transportation dollars distributed by ADOT. Due to this increased funding, and with the support and action of the Governor's Office and the Legislature, we achieved a seven-year acceleration of the freeway construction schedule — from 2014 to 2007. This means that the system will be delivered only a few months behind the date voters were promised in 1985 — 15 years ago.

We hope that the extraordinary progress in transportation achieved by MAG, ADOT, the Governor's Office and the Legislature is recognized by those of you familiar with our efforts — and soon, we hope, by the rest of the Valley's transportation users as well. We also hope that recognition extends to MAG's ongoing commitment to act in the best interests of this region.



Regional Council Meeting Report for January 19, 2000

Draft TIP Approved for Public Review

During their meeting January 19, 2000, the MAG Regional Council approved the tentative FY 2001-2005 Transportation for public review and comment. The five-year list of projects for MAG federal funds includes \$33 million dollars in street projects, \$14 million in transit projects, and \$11 million in bicycle/pedestrian projects.

The 2001-2005 TIP marked the first major program to be developed using a new regionally-based transportation planning and programming process set in the "Casa Grande Resolves," and was developed cooperatively between the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), transit agencies and MAG.

MAG received requests for new projects totaling more than \$400 million, although only \$80 million in MAG federal funds was available for those new projects. Along with projects programmed during earlier funding cycles, the TIP encompasses about \$4 billion and includes more than 1300 projects.

For more information, contact Paul Ward, MAG Transportation Programming Manager, (602) 254-6300.

Grade Separations Approved for Grand Avenue

In May, 1998, the MAG Regional Council approved conducting a Major Investment Study (MIS) for the Grand Avenue corridor. The MIS assessed two options in detail, including alternating grade separations and limited expressway. A steering committee recommended that grade separations be used, with modifications at two intersections to allow for further upgrades to expressway standards in the future. The Regional Council approved the recommendations of the steering committee, allowing the MIS to be included in the Draft MAG Long Range Transportation Plan 2000 Update for a conformity analysis, with the MIS concept for completion by 2006. The Long Range Transportation Plan concept is for the facility to be a controlled access expressway.

For more information, contact Terry Johnson, MAG Transportation Manager, (602) 254-6300.

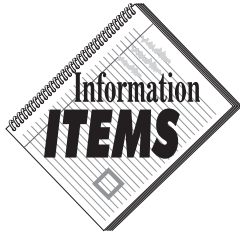


Upcoming Issues

MAG Awaits Word on Dust Plan

Working to avoid federal sanctions, on December 23, 1999 MAG submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) a revised plan for reducing unhealthy dust. But it remains unclear as to whether the EPA will review the plan in time to avoid restrictions on large industrial sources of particulates. March 2, 2000 is the date the EPA set for a first set of restrictions to go into effect. Those restrictions would prohibit any industry producing more than 70 tons per year of air-polluting particles from starting up or expanding, unless they could reduce dust emissions by two pounds for every pound created.

MAG revised its Serious Area PM-10 Plan after the EPA informed the agency in November that it would not approve the original plan. The revised MAG plan recommends using federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds for region-wide paving projects; purchasing PM-10 certified street sweepers; and reducing the assumed compliance rate for Rule 310 (Maricopa County's fugitive dust control rule) from 90 percent to 80 percent.



Information Items

Valley Vision 2025 Finishes Report

After two years of tapping into the Valley's community consciousness to identify the region's values and visions, the Valley Vision 2025 Committee is wrapping up work on its report. The "Valley Vision 2025 Report" is a comprehensive look at the work of the Committee during its two-year journey toward a regional Vision Plan. The report is the culmination of the efforts of the Committee and includes input from hundreds of Valley residents.

The Valley Vision 2025 Committee began its work in January of 1998. During the next two years, the Committee gathered information through three main sources: collaborative groups, thematic subcommittees, and public forums. The report includes a comprehensive summary of the work done to date, as well as recommendations for future activities. Additional steps recommended by the committee include conducting a statistically-valid, random-sample telephone survey; establishing a joint public/private partnership; and developing implementation strategies and performance measures for the Vision. The Committee will endorse the plan during a meeting February 2nd at the MAG offices.

For more information, contact Corey Cox, MAG Regional Development Manager, (602) 254-6300.



Upcoming Events

Domestic Violence Council Begins Work

In the first comprehensive, regionwide effort to address the Valley's dramatic rise in domestic violence, the MAG Domestic Violence Council will convene for the first time on January 27, 2000. The Council will meet from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. at MAG. The task of the 35-member council will be to oversee the implementation of 41 recommendations contained in the MAG Regional Domestic Violence Plan. The Plan was developed following one of the Valley's bloodiest years for domestic violence. The community-wide effort pulled together more than 150 professionals and individuals, who spent four months developing the recommendations. The strategies contained in the plan seek to prevent violence through education, awareness and training, and to put in place a seamless, effective system of domestic violence services regionwide.

For more information, contact Mary Thomson, MAG Domestic Violence Specialist, (602) 254-6300.

Next Regional Council Meeting

The next Regional Council Meeting will be held February 23, 2000 at 5:00 p.m. at the MAG offices, 302 N. 1st Ave., Suite 200. Agenda items will include review and possible approval of a financing mechanism for acceleration of general purpose lanes through the Mesa section of the Superstition Freeway, an annual report on the MAG freeway system, and a request for funding of a media campaign for the summer ozone season.

For more information, contact Dennis Smith, MAG Assistant Director, (602) 254-6300.